

Text and Commentary

THE ARTICLES OF FAITH

OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

1 We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.

2 We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.

1 The first article affirms the Latter-day Saints' faith in the Godhead. The existence of a loving Heavenly Father who is personally concerned with the lives and salvation of His children underpins the Saints' worldview and sense of purpose in life. Of equal importance to this worldview and sense of purpose is the divine sonship of Jesus Christ, who performed an infinite atonement to draw the Father's children back into His presence, a point that is reiterated in the third article. Finally, the Father's means of communicating with His children and of revealing to them light and truth is accomplished through the Holy Ghost, who stands next to the Father and the Son as the third member of the Godhead. *Joseph Smith's teachings on the Godhead.* In a discourse delivered sometime around May 1841, the Prophet taught that an "everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organizations of the earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth. These personages, according to Abraham's record, are called God the First, the Creator; God the Second, the Redeemer; and God the Third, the Witness or Testator." This detail is missing from the extant text of the book of Abraham (suggesting that the Prophet had translated or revealed more material than is presently published). In any case, it demonstrates the influence the Prophet's scriptural translations and revelations had on his theological thought as it developed line upon line. On June 15, 1844, in one of his last public discourses before his death, the Prophet told his audience, "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit; and that these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods." Though not explicitly detailed in the first article of faith, this teaching and the Prophet's revelations on God's corporeality and humankind's potential for divinization and exaltation (articulated most forcefully in the April 7, 1844, King Follet Sermon) are the most radical departures from classical Christian thought on the nature of God.

2 Latter-day Saints challenge the historical Christian teaching of original sin and what it theologically implies about the inherently sinful, depraved state of humanity. First formulated by St. Augustine in the fourth century AD, the doctrine of original sin posits that humanity inherited the consequences and, crucially, the *culpability* of Adam's sin on account of their descent from the first man. The full nature and scope of original sin has been debated among Christian theologians since Augustine's day. Latter-day Saints do not deny humanity's need for redemption, as articulated in the next article, nor the deleterious affects the Fall of Adam and Eve have had on humanity, but they do deny the total depravity and culpability of humanity for Adam and Eve's transgression. A revelation given to Joseph Smith on May 6, 1833, affirms

3 We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.

4 We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

that “every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:38).

3 Closely related to this belief in the Fall of Adam and Eve is Latter-day Saints’ belief in the need for a Savior to achieve an infinite atonement that will redeem humanity (compare 2 Nephi 9:7). Without a Fall, there is no need for a Redemption. Soteriology, or the theology of salvation, concerns itself with attempting to understand and formulate how men and women achieve salvation and overcome the effects of the Fall. The two crucial questions underlying any discussion of soteriology are how salvation is achieved and who can achieve it. The first question asks what the relationship is between faith, grace, and works, while the second asks about the scope of Christ’s Atonement regarding who it saves. Answers to these questions varied greatly in the Christian world of Joseph Smith’s day, with Calvinists and other Reformed Christians on the one end teaching a limited atonement for only those God had predestined to be saved and Universalists on the other side teaching unconditional universal salvation for all humanity. Many Christians likewise disagreed over the proper role between faith and works in salvation. Latter-day Saints reject the soteriological extremes of Reformed Protestantism on the one hand and Universalism on the other and insist that *all* men and women may be saved (thus denying limited atonement) while also affirming that it can only be achieved through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel (thus denying unconditional salvation).

4 The fourth article develops the third by clarifying the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ to which men and women must be obedient to be saved. This is clearer in the *T&S* rendition of the first line of this article, which reads, “We believe these ordinances are . . .,” with the antecedent to “these ordinances” being “the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” of the third article. This reading was retained until the 1902 edition of the Pearl of Great Price, where it was changed to its current reading on the recommendation of James E. Talmage. The primary definition of *ordinance* in Joseph Smith’s day was “a rule established by authority; a permanent rule of action” (Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary). In this regard, faith and repentance can indeed be seen as ordinances as well as principles of the gospel. *Additional principles of the gospel*. In a discourse delivered between June 26 and July 2, 1839, Joseph Smith indicated that “the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement are necessary to preach among the first principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

5 We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

6 We believe in the same organization that existed in the primitive church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.

7 We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.

5 Here the Prophet identifies three components that go into qualifying those who preach the gospel and administer its ordinances: first, being called by the spirit of revelation; second, being set apart by the laying on of hands; and third, being set apart by those in authority. This article addresses concerns the Christian world has historically had over the question of authority: where does it derive, and how does it operate? The Latter-day Saint emphasis on priesthood ordination to qualify those who administer the ordinances of the gospel diverges from historical and contemporary Protestantism and aligns itself more closely with Catholic and Orthodox understanding.

6 Just as the fourth article builds on the third, so the sixth builds on the fifth by enumerating the offices that comprise the ecclesiastical structure of the Church of Jesus Christ. The fifth article describes how an individual attains an office in the Church, while the sixth lists what some of those offices are. *The primitive church*. Here the adjective “primitive” should not be taken to mean “simple or unsophisticated” but rather “earlier, ancient, or primeval.” The primitive church refers to the church established by Jesus during His mortal ministry. The five offices listed by the Prophet are attested in the New Testament as having been operative during the first century church, and indeed, the language of this article appears to be following Ephesians 4:11. Although Joseph Smith taught that the offices of the modern Church of Jesus Christ represent a restoration of those offices in the primitive church of the first century, it should not be assumed that the organizational structure of the Church today represents a static, one-for-one carbon copy or replica of the apostolic church.

7 Along with the restoration of the offices of the primitive church comes the restoration of its gifts and powers. The seventh article enumerates some of these gifts, which are described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 (compare Moroni 10:8–18; Doctrine and Covenants 46:13–26). *Gift of tongues . . . interpretation of tongues*. There are two manifestations of these gifts. The first, termed glossolalia, is the speaking or singing in an unknown (heavenly) language. The manifestation of this gift is abundantly documented in the early days of the Restoration. Early Latter-day Saints, including Joseph Smith, were also interested in attempting to recover the primordial language of Eden and the heavenly language spoken by God and other divine beings. The second form of this gift, xenoglossia, is the gift of being able to communicate and interpret foreign earthly languages, as exemplified in the account of the apostles miraculously speaking in foreign languages on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This form of the gift of tongues is more

8 We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

9 We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

10 We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the ten tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.

frequently emphasized and sought after in the contemporary Church, especially among missionaries serving in a foreign nation and learning a second language.

8 In 1842, when these articles were written, the Church accepted three books as scripture: the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants. In the Wentworth Letter the Prophet emphasized that the Book of Mormon was to “be united with the Bible for the accomplishment of the purposes of God in the last days.” Although not mentioned in this article, the Doctrine and Covenants as a book of living scripture—a book of current, ongoing revelation—is implicitly assumed in the next article. By naming the Book of Mormon alongside the Bible as the word of God, Joseph affirmed that the canon of scripture was open and that he was in a position by virtue of his own prophetic office to produce new scripture. *As far as it is translated correctly*. This article rejects the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*, or the belief that scripture alone is sufficient for establishing doctrine and authority in the church. One of the truths the Prophet learned through his revelations and work on the “new translation” or revision of the Bible from 1830 to 1833 is that the Bible is on its own insufficient and suffered from errors of translation, transmission, and interpretation (all three of these concepts are assumed under the Prophet’s use of the word “translation” in this article). As Joseph taught in an October 15, 1843, discourse, “I believe the Bible as it ought to be, as it came from the pen of the original writers.”

9 Once again, as with articles four and three and six and five, this article builds on the one that immediately precedes it by confirming that with an open canon of scripture comes also continuing revelation. This principle is foundational to the faith of the Latter-day Saints, who uphold that God continues to reveal light and truth pertaining to the operation of His kingdom and the things of eternity. The canonical book of Doctrine and Covenants serves as the scriptural repository of the revelations of Joseph Smith and his prophetic successors.

10 The tenth article briefly encapsulates the Latter-day Saints’ eschatology, or the theology of the ultimate destiny of humanity, the end times, the Millennium, and Final Judgment. The components that constitute Joseph Smith’s eschatology as defined in this article are scattered throughout Restoration scripture and are the literal gathering of Israel (3 Nephi 20–22; Doctrine and Covenants 110:11), the building up of Zion (Doctrine and Covenants 6:6; 11:6; 12:6; 14:6; 45:66–67; 57:1–3), Christ’s return to rule on earth (Doctrine and Covenants 29:11;

11 We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.

12 We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.

45:55–59; 101:22–34; 133:25, 42–52), and the regeneration of the earth into celestial glory (Doctrine and Covenants 29:23–25; 43:32; 77:1; 88:17–20; 130:8–11). *Glosses*. The *T&S* version of this article simply read, “Zion will be built upon this continent.” The 1851 Pearl of Great Price printed in England adds the gloss “(American)” after the demonstrative article, probably to avoid confusing European readers. Orson Pratt dropped the gloss in the 1878 Salt Lake City edition. It was picked up again in the 1902 edition, where it was offset in brackets with the definite article (“[the American]”). The 1976 edition added “(the New Jerusalem)” after “Zion” and incorporated “(American)” into the text, so that the verse now reads, “That Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent.”

11 Latter-day Saints greatly value religious freedom for all men and women. The urgency they have attached this universal right originates, in part, from their own history of persecution because of their faith. In 1841, the Nauvoo city council passed an ordinance declaring that “the Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Latter-day Saints, Quakers, Episcopalians Universalist Unitarians, Mahommedans [Muslims], and all other religious sects and denominations whatever, shall have free toleration and equal privileges in this city.” Doctrine and Covenants 134:1–4 outlines the Saints’ belief that one of the roles of government is to ensure the protection of religious freedom.

12 In principle, Latter-day Saints affirm the importance of submitting to the law and being conscientious citizens of their respective nations. Doctrine and Covenants 134:5–8 outlines the Saints’ belief on this point. However, historically there have been times when the Saints have practiced civil disobedience when they felt laws were unjustly encroaching on their rights. The most notable example of this was their opposition to the anti-polygamy laws enacted by the United States federal government in the late nineteenth century. These extraordinary exceptions, however, do not otherwise justify the flaunting of laws or government authority based on personal whim or preference.

13 We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

— Joseph Smith

13 The final article lists just a few of the virtues that Latter-day Saints strive to emulate: honesty, loyalty, chastity, and benevolence. These virtues are promoted elsewhere in modern revelation (see Doctrine and Covenants 42:22–23; 51:9; 64:10; 82:1; 97:8). *The admonition of Paul*. Paraphrasing Philippians 4:8. The *T&S* version of this article sets off “we believe all things, we hope all things” in quotation marks, likely indicating a purposeful reference to 1 Corinthians 13:7.